

# George Will: Perfect politics? It's elementary.

By [George F. Will](#), Published: June 13

Montgomery County, on the District of Columbia's northern border, is a dormitory for the nation's government, where federal workers' sleep is disturbed only by dreams of new ways to improve us. The county's population of almost 1 million includes many political staffers and consultants, lawyers, lobbyists and others whose common profession is to [cause political power to flow to Washington](#). Montgomery County also is — this could be just a coincidence — a laboratory of liberalism.

Cross Western Avenue on Wisconsin Avenue, leaving Washington and entering Montgomery County, and you immediately pass Ralph Lauren, Cartier, Bulgari, Christian Dior, Gucci, Jimmy Choo, Tiffany & Co. and Saks Fifth Avenue. For those who toil in the ambit of the federal government, virtue may be its own reward, but Louis Vuitton luggage is not to be sneezed at.

Washington and its environs are doing well by doing good for — or at any rate to — the rest of America. Four of America's five wealthiest counties, and nine of the richest 15, are in the D.C. area. [Joel Kotkin, the demographer, notes](#) that median household income in the nine is more than \$100,000, twice the national average. Washington, Kotkin notes, is not a center of real commerce, "where people make things or risk their livelihoods on ideas," but it thrives on rent-seeking transactions between economic factions and "the collusional capitalist state." This area is notable not only for its opulence but also — this could be just a coincidence — for industrious regulating to bring everyone into compliance with the right rules.

Which brings us to the reign of virtue at Bethesda Elementary School. There, campaign-finance reform reached an apogee in recent student elections to pick officers for the next school year. [The Post reported this](#) with overflowing approval under the headline "These elections stayed classy":

"Candidates at the affluent, 500-student school, where many parents have political connections of one sort or another, can't give out buttons. They can't wear T-shirts bearing their names. They can't talk about their competition. And they can't make promises. Not even about school lunches."

A 9-year-old candidate for vice president told The Post, "We can't say certain things because the kids would get too excited." *Of course* politics should be purged of excitement. But lest you get the wrong idea — the idea that liberalism would, if it could, so firmly [restrict political speech](#) that elective offices might as well be allocated by lotteries — the school authorities do permit candidates to post signs. Just six per

candidate, however, and only as long as the signs say nothing about promises or rivals — or perhaps anything else.

The Post says the “constraints” were first imposed “in the 2008 election cycle to keep campaign expenditures from spiraling out of control.” Something uncontrolled? Can’t have that. Otherwise corruption or the appearance thereof — [the rationale for adult speech “constraints”](#) emanating from Washington — might become the serpent in the garden that is Bethesda Elementary. The next thing you know the wee candidates would be competing for votes the way George Washington did. [He offered whiskey](#). At Bethesda Elementary, the prophylactic rules keep size-4 sneakers off the slippery slope to perdition, understood as candidates dispensing Tootsie Rolls.

But even in Montgomery County, where liberal high-mindedness is the established religion, it is not easy engineering a pristine politics of absolutely equal capacities and perfect manners. The Post reports that during his speech a 9-year-old candidate for treasurer used a prop — two bricks made of shredded \$100 bills — that his mother, a former Treasury official, got from the Federal Reserve. It hardly seems fair to allow such parental interventions — mom as super PAC — to interfere with the creation of a level playing field.

And it gets worse. A 9-year-old candidate for secretary has a mother who is a congressional staffer but says she got more help with her speech from her father, a pollster. A 10-year-old running for president on an anti-bullying platform included in the first draft of her speech the confession “sometimes, I can be mean” but “my mother said, ‘Take that out immediately.’ ” Surely Bethesda Elementary should *do something* about unequal political advantages resulting from unregulated political talk between child candidates and their parents.

Bethesda Elementary is, however, diligently preparing its pupils for the world Montgomery County hopes is coming. It will be a world in which politics, cleansed of promises and criticism and too much talk, will be perfectly equal and ever so nice.

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